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SUBJECT: MAYOR OF TEHRAN VISITS JAPAN

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)
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¶1. (C) Tehran Mayor Mohammad-Baqer Ghalibaf visited Japan October 16 - 21, confirmed MOFA Second Middle East Director Motosada Matano. According to Matano, Ghalibaf was invited by the Japanese under the auspices of their "Opinion Leader Program." The Japanese view him as important because he is the mayor of Tehran and also because he is a major national political figure who challenged President Ahmadinejad in the last election and is likely do to so again in the next. Ghalibaf was accompanied to Japan by his wife and approximately 10 other associates, said Matano.

¶2. (C) While in Tokyo between October 16-19, Ghalibaf met with the Governor of Tokyo, had dinner with Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Mitoji Yabunaka, and attended a breakfast with ten members of the Japan-Iran Parliamentary Friendship Association, including Diet members Taro Nakayama and Yoriko Koike. He also met with Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, addressed the Foreign Correspondents Club, met with the Japan-Iran Economic Committee of the Keidanren (Japan's business association) led by Shimizu Corporation Chairman Tetsuya Nomura, and attended a dinner hosted by the Iranian Ambassador at which Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Masahiko Shibayama was a guest.

¶3. (C) Ghalibaf's discussion with both Yabunaka and Nakasone focused on the nuclear issue, Iran's upcoming elections, and Iran's economy, according to Matano. With regard to Iran's nuclear program, Yabunaka advised Ghalibaf that Iran must overcome the credibility problem it has developed and improve the image of Iran in the international community. The first step would be to comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions that have been enacted concerning Iran's nuclear program. Ghalibaf replied by repeating the usual Iranian arguments about their right to produce nuclear power and the "fact" that the program is for peaceful purposes only. Ghalibaf also cited a "double standard" in that the West seems to be willing to make accommodations for nuclear programs in India and North Korea. Matano said that Ghalibaf did not use any charged or emotional language when making his points, but it was clear to the Japanese that the Iranians are watching very closely U.S. behavior and reactions to the Iranian program.

¶4. (C) Concerning Iranian elections and the economy, Ghalibaf told his interlocutors that the election will bring "very tough competition" and that the main issue will be the domestic economy, which is now beginning to suffer even more due to the downturn in oil prices. Another major issue, Ghalibaf predicted, would be the role and values of Islam in society. (NOTE: Ghalibaf is considered to be conservative on religious issues. END NOTE.) Motosada reported that Ghalibaf's conversation with FM Nakasone also included many pleasantries and a historical review of the close relations between Japan and Iran over the years.

15. (C) Ghalibaf's remarks to the press tracked with those reported by Matano during the official meetings. He told reporters Iran must make efforts to foster mutual trust with the international community, including engaging in dialogue with the world in "a better way." He indicated Iran needs to work more closely with the IAEA to prove that it is developing its nuclear program within the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and criticized the apparent double-standard employed by the United States in offering support to countries, such as India, that have developed nuclear weapons and which are not signatories to the NPT. Ghalibaf criticized Ahmadinejad's economic policies stating that too many imports and the failure to improve productivity have resulted in a severe crisis of inflation. He is quoted as telling the press: "The president and I are good friends as we have worked together before. It is exactly because I have respect for him that I criticize his mistakes."

16. (C) In addition to his meetings, Ghalibaf toured a variety of sites in Tokyo, and visited Hiroshima (where he met the mayor and toured atomic bomb exhibits) and Kobe (where he learned about earthquake response and toured a mosque). The Japanese found Ghalibaf to be a "calm, decent, and pleasant" man who was very smart and well-informed.
SCHIEFFER